

# ***VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION FOR PUPIL TRANSPORTATION***

## **Position Paper**

### **Advertising on School Buses**

With education and school transportation budgets decreasing all over the country, school divisions have been forced to do more with less. Finding additional sources of revenue is becoming a significant issue in many states and local school districts. One alternative has been to consider allowing the placement of advertisements on the exterior of school buses. Only a few school districts have proceeded with such programs. This paper represents the position of the Virginia Association for Pupil Transportation, (VAPT), on the subject. Statements and data from various sources are cited throughout, and credit is given as appropriate.

The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services, (NASDPTS), has released a position paper entitled, "Advertising On School Buses." According to the President of NASDPTS, "the State Directors Association does not endorse advertising on the exterior of school buses since such advertisements are a potential source of driver distraction, a known cause of motor vehicle accidents."

There is currently no data to prove whether or not there is a safety risk associated with advertising on school buses. No accident data has ever been collected on the effect that advertising on any type of vehicle, including, transit buses, taxi cabs, etc., has on driver distraction and resulting accidents. There have, however, been studies of the effects of various types of driver distraction and inattention relating to accidents.

According to School Bus Fleet transportation publication website, [www.schoolbusfleet.com/Resource/ads.htm](http://www.schoolbusfleet.com/Resource/ads.htm), The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, (NHTSA), issued a technical paper entitled, "The Role of Driver Inattention in Crashes," which shows that between three and four percent of motor vehicle crashes can be attributed to driver distraction caused by objects or activities outside the vehicle.

Additionally, they cite a 1994 study of crashes in North Carolina that showed that about 3.7 percent of the 18,000 crashes studied were attributed to driver distraction from a source outside the vehicle.

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They also make reference to a study in Indiana, entitled, "1979 Indiana Tri-Level Study of the Causes of Traffic Accidents," which found that approximately 4 percent of crashes were caused by an external distraction to the driver, such as attention to a competing event, activity, or event outside the vehicle.

These studies dealt with driver distraction from all types of sources outside the vehicle, including other persons, activities, and advertising on signs, buildings and other motor vehicles. School Bus Fleet states further, "While it is not possible to estimate the risk of motor vehicle crashes attributed solely to drivers being distracted by advertising, it is evident that driver distraction is a definitive casual factor in a small but significant percentage of motor vehicle crashes. Since advertising on the exterior of a school bus is a potential source of driver distraction, it is reasonable to assume that such advertisements will increase the likelihood of driver distraction and potentially result in accidents that would not have otherwise occurred."

A special resolution was enacted at the twelfth national conference, 1995 National Standards for School Transportation, which stated, "whereas, the unobstructed color pattern of a school bus is a nationally recognized symbol of caution to the motoring public, and, whereas, advertising on school buses will expose school students to unnecessary risk during the loading and unloading process by distracting motorists driving in the immediate vicinity of a school bus, therefore, be it resolved, that the twelfth National Conference on School Transportation vigorously urges state and U.S. Territory to prohibit advertising on school buses."

It should be noted, also, that the Virginia Department of Education, Pupil Transportation Division, does not allow advertising on school buses.

Advertising on school buses also presents the issue of controlling the content of the ads. While it may be the intent of a school division to restrict the advertisements to a type they can control, legal challenges of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, abridging the freedom of speech, may or may not occur. While no lawsuits have been filed on the issue of advertising on school buses, there have been cases that may have applicability to the issue of controlling their content. The cost for a local school district to defend its advertising policy in court could conceivably exceed the revenue obtained from the advertising itself.

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Finally, VAPT conducted a state-wide survey in 1995, among school division personnel responsible for pupil transportation. One of the questions was whether they supported advertising on school buses. The response was an overwhelming 92% against advertising.

Accordingly, it is the position of the VAPT, that while the determination of revenue sources is a reality of school divisions, there are many better alternatives than to consider one that could jeopardize the safety of school children, as well as the potential liability of a school division. The VAPT, therefore, does not support advertising on school buses.